

Togo - July 2006

Report by Keith Lindsey

Introduction to Togo

Togo is a small French speaking west African country and lies between Ghana and Benin. Its population is a little over 5 million. From south to north it covers three climatic and vegetational zones, which range from the wet and humid south to the dry north.

In contrast to Ghana, Togo is a relatively closed country. It won independence from France in 1960, and from 1967 it was ruled by a dictator, General Gnassingbe Eyadema. Following his death in 2005, his son, Faure Gnassingbe was elected as the new President.

For a brief period at the beginning of the 1900s, "Togoland" belonged to Germany. Even today, Togolese people respect the Germans for the quality of the buildings, roads and bridges that they built.

In Togo there is no tradition of training or even of holding conferences. Before any such event can be arranged, permission needs to be sought from the relevant authorities.

Introduction to *anamed* seminars

Salem is a project in Germany committed to tree-planting, peace and poverty relief. Salem supports Gbati Nikabou in Bassar (350km north of Lomé) to plant trees and to educate others in good environmental practice. In November 2004 I was invited by Salem to conduct a first seminar in Natural Medicine for 30 people, mainly from Bassar but also from Lomé.

I was delighted to be invited by Salem to return in July 2006 to run a second seminar in Bassar. I was greatly assisted by Jonas Lange of Salem Germany in the preparation and planning, and also by Agnes Ziegelmayr, a German medical therapist very committed to supporting the work of Natural Medicine in Togo. In the seminar itself, I was very happy to be able to share the leadership with Gbati Nikabou, who since the first seminar had gained so much experience in the practice of Natural Medicine.

Once again permission to hold the seminar was required from several quarters, specifically the Ministry for Home Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the local prefect and the head teacher of the school, where we were to hold the seminar. Since we were now known, this year this process went very smoothly.

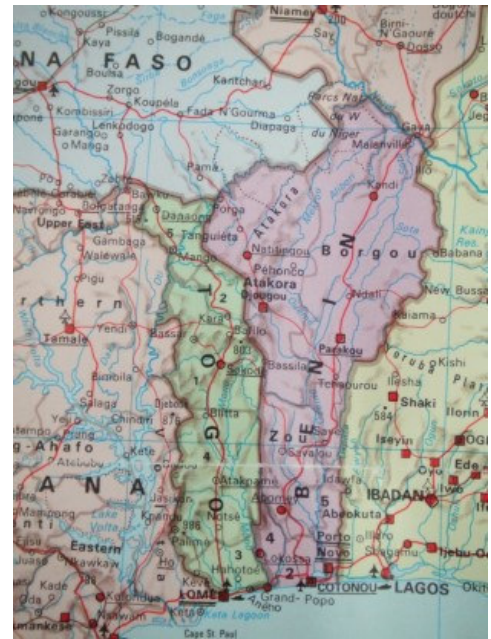
anamed in Lomé

This year we wanted also to run a short seminar in the capital city, Lomé.

Through Dr Fleig and Dr Heiner in Germany, two very active medical doctors who have both done a lot of work in Togo, we were introduced to ACPROSA – "*Action pour la Protection de la Santé*". This is an initiative based in Lomé which aims to foster cooperation between traditional healers and modern medicine practitioners, health officials and academics, and between Christians and Moslems.

Already in 2004 Gbati Nikabou had established a very good relationship with the Ministry of Health. As a result, we were able to share in a half-day seminar in Lomé on 20 July convened by ACPROSA. Happily, both ACPROSA and the Ministry of Health are impressed by the concept of Natural Medicine that *anamed* promotes, and we looked forward to working together again in the future.

This in fact happened very quickly. Having now been promised the support of the local branch of the World Health Organisation (WHO), ACPROSA held a further successful 3 day seminar at the beginning of September 2006. Gbati Nikabou addressed the meeting on behalf of *anamed*. ACPROSA hopes to win WHO funding to establish its own large garden of medicinal plants.



Map of Togo, showing Ghana to the west, Benin to the east and Burkino Faso to the north.

Bassar, seminar 1: Monday 24th July to Friday 28th for “first timers”.

Since our first seminar in 2004 word had spread rapidly, and Gbati was under pressure from many people who wanted to attend this second seminar. Thus we had 40 local participants and five paying guests. These were

- two medically trained personnel from the hospital in Sodo, supported by “Togo Freunde” in Hannover,
- a doctor and an agriculturalist from Benin, and
- an experienced healer from Burkino Faso.

These visitors enriched the seminar significantly with their knowledge and experience. In spite of the large number, levels of attention were very high and the questions and discussion never seemed to stop.

Since our first seminar, Gbati Nikabou had extended his tree nursery to include many medicinal plants, and had also established a large, well laid out garden, in which each group of plants was clearly labelled. An excellent teaching resource!



Gbati addressing the seminar on the theme of “the importance of trees”

Excellent vegetarian food was provided by a group of people from Gbati’s family in Lomé. As in 2004, the kitchen had to be set up especially for the purpose in a room adjacent to the school sports hall in which we met. In Bassar there is no tradition of holding seminars, conferences or training events, and therefore all cooking equipment, and in fact everything we required for the seminar, had to be specially organised.

The seminar was opened by the local Prefect. He also presented the certificates on the final day.

Each day we worked from 8a.m. to 7p.m., with breaks morning and afternoon for herbal teas or fruit juice , and midday for lunch. Food and drink are an important part of the seminar itself – the quality of the food we eat has a big influence on our health.

Each participant received a copy of the seminar handbook, “Natural Medicine in the Tropics: Treatments”. Theory sessions were held on many topics, almost always with a practical demonstration. These included:

Topic	Practical demonstration
Malaria	Use of clinical thermometers
<i>Artemisia annua</i> : cultivation and use	Sowing seeds
Diarrhoea	Production of anti-amoeba tea and ORS
Skin problems	Production of ointment (with chillies)
Wounds	Use of aloe gel, garlic and sugar with pawpaw sap
AIDS	Role play to demonstrate the difference between HIV and AIDS, and the function of the immune system
Neem	Production of neem seed oil
Moringa	Water clarification
<i>Carica papaya</i>	Taking sap from an unripe fruit
Garlic	Production of garlic sugar, garlic honey and garlic oil.

Additional activities included:

- Presentation of plants brought by participants.
- Production of black stones for scorpion bites.
- Viewing of videos on malaria and moringa, and slides of many plants.

- Visit to the medicinal garden.
- Groupwork which examines broader aspects of health and development issues.
- Use of three buckets for rubbish separation and disposal.
- Discussion of the Code of Conduct for Natural Medicine practitioners.
- Making soap.
- A continual emphasis on the importance of planting trees. We planted of several young plants of the indigenous species *Khaya senegalensis* in the school grounds.

Bassar, seminar 2: Saturday 29th July to Sunday 30th for “second timers”.

Almost 20 people attended for these two days – that is almost everyone from Bassar that attended the 2004 seminar. Many are involved in a new “Nature Club” which, since then, has met monthly.

Each person gave a brief report of their activities. Mr Nibiba Issa runs a project for people who suffer AIDS. He said:

- a) according to laboratory analysis, patients who drink artemisia tea enjoy an increase in the CD4 blood cell count. He recommends artemisia tea rather than ARV drugs.
- b) He also recommends garlic, aloe (especially for patients with skin problems) and moringa leaf powder.



Seminar participants tasting aloe during the garden visit

- c) He has taught AIDS patients how to make soap, which provides them with a small amount of income. They produce neem seed oil and add it to soap, and that helps with skin problems.
- d) Patients with diarrhoea are treated with anti-amoeba tea and ORS.
- e) He works together with traditional healers, and they exchange experiences.

The two day programme included making an ointment, making a balance, discussion of the moringa video and visiting Gbati’s medicinal garden. As always, we sowed artemisia seeds and discussed the benefits of this plant.

A very interesting discussion developed on the theme of “how do we evaluate our progress and success. We decided that we may assess progress at three levels, a) the

extent of our personal activities, b) from our records of the treatment of patients and c) by changes at the community level.

Visit to Gape Kpodzi

Gape Kpodzi is a village about 60 km north of Lomé that has received a lot of technical and financial support from a group in Fellbach, Germany. Among many other things, they have built a secondary school, provided boreholes and piped water, and supplied two tunnel driers. We have described these driers, which were designed in Hohenheim University near Stuttgart, in our *anamed* publications, but I had never seen one in use in Africa.

We were received very warmly, and given a very interesting tour of the village. Although the weather was predominantly cloudy, the driers were still being used to dry maize, a service which also benefits people from surrounding villages. The driers are also used for beans, manioc, yams, various fruits and chillies. We also were shown the school, training workshop and health centre. In return, we spoke about artemisia, and sowed seeds which we left with them.



Our host Etienne by the tunnel drier

I hope that, in the future, representatives from this village, and particularly from the health centre, will attend an *anamed* seminar.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Gbati Nikabou who worked tirelessly to organise the seminar, to make the formal applications for permission to hold the event, to give out the invitations and to arrange the catering. Many thanks also that, since 2004, he has continued to meet with, encourage and support the participants of the first seminar, often on a weekly basis.

To the six kitchen staff, who, for seven days running, were the first to arrive and the last to leave.

To the official authorities and especially the Prefect for very willingly giving their permission for us to hold the event.

To Salem, for their invitation to hold the seminars, and to their financial supporters for the funding.

To Gbati, Jonas Lange and Agnes Ziegelmayr. The four of us worked closely together for two weeks. They were a great source of encouragement and support, and we had a lot of fun together.

To Dr Usha Heimer in Agou, Kpalime and our hosts in Gape Kpodzi for their hospitality.

Recommendations

It gives me great confidence to know that, supported by Salem, Gbati Nikabou will a) continue to care for his medicinal garden and plant / tree nursery, b) together with others in Bassar care for the medicinal garden in the grounds of Bassar Hospital, c) continue to meet with, support and train the participants of our seminars and d) keep in touch with Natural Medicine practitioners in other parts of the country.

There are now people committed to Natural Medicine in Bassar, Sodo and Kpalime in the south-west, Lomé in the south and Dapaong in the extreme north. Also there is the initiative ACPROSA. The network of Natural Medicine practitioners in Togo is already very significant. Gbati, with his skills, quiet energy and diplomacy, is the key person in the further development of that network.

I recommend:

1. that, through Gbati, we remain in close contact with both ACPROSA and the Ministry of Health, in the hope that
 - a) the models of practice in Bassar and Sodo be replicated in other hospitals throughout the country. That is, having a medicinal gardens in the hospital grounds, having medical personnel trained to make the products of the gardens into Natural Medicines, and using Natural Medicines in the hospitals, particularly to treat malaria and diarrhoea.
 - b) the Ministry will give its support for the training of traditional healers in Natural Medicine throughout the country.
2. that in the fairly near future *anamed* be prepared to run two week long seminars in different parts of the country, in support of this programme. These “*anamed*” seminars may be led by Gbati Nikabou and others from Togo, with minimal input from *anamed* Germany. But they will need funding.
3. Togo, Benin and Burkino Faso are three French speaking countries which enjoy strong links with each other. *anamed* should aim to have enough trained people in Togo who can run seminars in these two countries, together with the people who attended the 2006 Bassar seminar.
4. we encourage the *anamed* group in Bassar to explore the possibility of printing *anamed* books in Togo.



Participants in the first Bassar seminar make soap